

The Lawton Family

A Short History

The Lawton Family as we know it, dates from approximately 1830 - until the present and as with any family history it is the story of the human struggle for survival. It is the chronicle of some men and women who overcame great obstacles and of some others who were defeated. As with any history we highlight the victories and give a low profile to the defeats. I, therefore charge the young people of this family to fill in the gaps with information and stories as told by older members of the family. Remember Alex Haley is not the only Black Family in American with roots. Our own personal roots can and should be a source of pride.

From stories told to me by H. Walter Livingston Lawton, I learned that Brister and Hester were slaves bought in South Carolina and walked the weary miles to Sylvania, Ga. H. Walker Lawton firmly believed that some did not come from Africa but from islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. He was not entirely wrong because the coastal islands were used as stopovers to restore the captured Africans back to health after the long cramped voyage across the Atlantic. We should be aware that we are the descendants of those who were strong enough and willful enough to survive.

Brister and Hester were endowed with a large family. Again I can remember Walter Lawton counting his six brothers who were ministers of the gospel, and the rest of his brothers and sisters. David Cole, John Henry Cole, Issac Cole, Brister (Bubba), Japan, Luscious, Washington, Phoebe, Vinnie and Paul.

When I was young and only interested in myself, these stories seem like boasting. But with continued questioning I discovered that much of what I had heard was true. These stories were verified by older relatives such as Edna Couch and Gertrude Zeigler and by S.B. Lewis, a white resident of Sylvania, Ga. and a friend of the Lawton Family.

Brister had been the coachman for Robert Lawton, the white slaveholder and when freedom was declared, Brister and his brothers purchased tracts of land adjoining the "Big House" as the owners mansion was called.

Brister's son, also named Brister, had been the playmate of the slaverholder's son and had learned to read and write through this friendship. After the Emancipation, young Brister was sent off to school and completed his education at the Atlanta Baptist College. He became a minister, a prosperous farmer, a

schoolkeeper and a leader in the Baptist Association of the area.

There seems to have been a strong desire for training and education among our ancestors. They built a school and paid a teacher to teach the children and when the local teaching was finished, some children were sent off to boarding schools. The family thirst for knowledge continues with teachers, preachers and modern, up-to-date farmers included in our number. The Lawton Cemetery was established by the family near Sylvania, Georgia.

Some family members traveled away from the homestead and others remained. For example Washington Lawton settled in the area of Newington, Georgia and raised a family. Walter Lawton went to Philadelphia, Pa. in the early 1900's and eventually brought his family to that city.

During the early years between 1865 - 1925, sickness, death and crop failures constantly tested the vitality of the Lawton family. The fact that the seed of this family continues to flourish is excellent testimony to the God-given talent to survive.

There also runs through the family a strain of religious zeal. The family church, the Lawton Grove Baptist Church, organized about 1875, is still alive and well. Not only were there six preachers among the first Lawtons, but to this day, we are aware of 6 children of Ernest Lawton, Sr. and his wife Julia who were baptized on the same day. They are:

Anna Lawton Barnet - Tuscon, Arizona
Gladys Lawton - deceased
Lillia Lawton Travis - Washington, D.C.
Viella " Durham - Philadelphia, Pa.
Floyd " - deceased
Charles " - Hammonton, N.J.

The genes of religious fervor passed through generations from Rev. Luscious Lawton and settled in the spirit of his great-grandson Rev. Robert J. Lovett.

This is by no means a complete history of the Lawton family. It is the task of the living members to fill in the gaps with their stories. Of all the stories I have heard, some amusing and some heart rending, one thing stands out clearly. The men and women of this family faced life squarely even in the face of overwhelming odds.

We have a great heritage to emulate and to improve upon. The following portion of Thanatopsis by William Cullen Bryant is dedicated to that heritage.